

Alabama Forest Inventory Completed

By **STEVE NIX**, Forest Resource Analyst, Alabama Forestry Commission



The Alabama Periodic Forest Inventory for 2000 is complete. Trees on nearly 6,000 plots were measured during a period between February 1997 and December 2000. Nine crews working full time for the last three years collected enough data to provide a picture of the Alabama forest and how it fared during most of the 1990s.

All 67 counties in six units have forestry data and a portion of the state now has current published resource reports. Some of this data is still in review. More on the present survey later.

Historical Data

United States Forest Service and Alabama Forestry Commission field crews have been in the tree data collecting business for 50 years. Published reports based on this data were compiled for years 1953, 1963, 1973, 1982, and 1990. Data taken from these five surveys indicate a growing but changing resource.

These past surveys show that while sustaining the same amount of forested acres, Alabama continues to grow more trees than ever before. Eleven billion trees grew in Alabama forests in 1953. Four decades later the forest increased to 14 billion trees.

Amazingly, this growth occurred at the same time the forest products industry continued to expand plants and locate new ones. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw billions of dollars invested in by forest product companies in Alabama. At the same time 300,000 to 400,000 acres of trees were planted annually.

Timber volumes increased and have more than doubled in 40 years. Total tree volume increased from 11 billion cubic feet in 1953 to over 23 billion cubic feet in 1990. Both pine and hardwood volumes grew at about the same rate.

Improved forest management increased the statewide annual growth from 37.1 cubic feet in 1953 to 55.9 cubic feet in 1990 or to approximately one-half cord per acre. The cut also expanded from 28.7 cubic feet in 1953 to 49.8 cubic feet.

We are growing more wood than is being cut—and have been for 50 years.

The Present Survey

Information gathered from the latest Alabama survey data has forest resource analysts cautiously optimistic. At this writing, two southwest Alabama units are complete with published data. Two other units are in review.

Here is what we are finding:

- The total forest acreage for Alabama is increasing.
- Stocking levels are increasing (trees are fully occupying more acres).
- Pine acreage has stabilized and there is an increase in the hardwood forest.
- There are more non-industrial private forest acres than ever before.
- The total volume for both pine and hardwood is increasing.

Even with this good news, those reviewing the data have not yet come to any statewide conclusions. Much of the data is yet to be processed. However, the data for completed units look good.

To enhance the survey's reliability, a Survey Review Committee looks at every completed unit's data. This review committee is made up of users from state and federal government, the forest product industry, Auburn University, conservation organizations and private consultants. This broad-based committee's mission is to ensure a significant measure of quality control, lend credibility to the database and help in the distribution of the data.

As new information is processed, articles in *Alabama's TREASURED Forests* magazine will continue to provide updates. 